

This listing of claims will replace all prior versions, and listing of claims in the application:

Listing of claims:

Claim 1 (currently amended) A reduced-fat flavored coating comprising:

a flavoring agent in an amount sufficient to provide a selected flavor;

a sugar matrix of sugar crystals and sugar glass in an amount effective to provide the coating with sufficient structural integrity to prevent flowability at temperatures less than about 40°C; and

a plurality of microspheres comprising a dry hydrocolloid component that are dispersed through the flavoring agent and sugar matrix to provide a slippery mouthfeel that mimics fat and begins to disperse when in contact with saliva so as to mimic the melting of cocoa butter during consumption of chocolate,

~~wherein~~ the flavored coating is at least substantially anhydrous and has less than about 10 weight percent fat, and ~~wherein~~ the fat that is present exists as dispersed microdroplets within the coating.

Claim 2 (currently amended) The flavored coating of claim 1, wherein the hydrocolloid component is selected from the group consisting of ~~comprises at least one of~~ an isolated proteinaceous material, a galactomannan, ~~or~~ a granular starch, ~~or any and combinations~~ combination thereof.

Claim 3 (currently amended) The flavored coating of claim 1, wherein the hydrocolloid component is selected from the group consisting of ~~comprises~~ egg albumin, whey protein isolate, soy protein isolate, casein, sodium caseinate, guar gum, locust bean gum, fenugreek gum, tara gum, gum acacia, corn starch, potato starch, wheat starch, tapioca starch, ~~or a~~ and combinations ~~combination~~ thereof.

Claim 4 (currently amended) The flavored coating of claim 13, wherein the hydrocolloid component comprises guar gum, egg albumin, and at least one starch.

Claim 5 (currently amended) The flavored coating of claim 1, wherein the hydrocolloid component comprises at least one ~~or more~~ non-crosslinkable hydrocolloids.

Claim 6 (currently amended) The flavored coating of claim 1, wherein the hydrocolloid component will dissolve ~~become dissolved~~ at about 36°C to 38°C in saliva.

Claim 7 (original) The flavored coating of claim 1, wherein the microspheres swell in contact with a consumer's mouth and release a portion of the hydrocolloid component to permit disintegration thereof.

Claim 8 (currently amended) The flavored coating of claim 1, wherein the coating is glossy and the dispersed hydrocolloid component washes away from the mouth in about 80 to 120 percent of the time that it takes an equivalent amount of ~~for~~ chocolate to wash away from the mouth.

Claim 9 (currently amended) The flavored coating of claim 1, wherein the sugar matrix is selected from the group consisting of ~~comprises~~ sucrose, glucose, fructose, sorbitol, mannitol, maltitol, xylitol, erythritol, lactitol, polydextrose, maltodextrin, ~~or a combination~~ and combinations thereof.

Claim 10 (original) The flavored coating of claim 1, wherein the sugar matrix comprises corn syrup and powdered sucrose.

Claim 11 (currently amended) The flavored coating of claim 1, further comprising a milk component having ~~less than about 3 weight percent~~ a water content of less than 3 percent by weight.

Claim 12 (original) The flavored coating of claim 1, wherein the flavoring agent comprises cocoa.

Claim 13 (original) The flavored coating of claim 12, wherein a portion of the cocoa is alkalized cocoa.

Claim 14 (original) The flavored coating of claim 1, wherein the water activity is about 0.45 to 0.55.

Claim 15 (original) The flavored coating of claim 1, wherein the coating is anhydrous.

Claim 16 (original) The flavored coating of claim 1, wherein the coating has a shelf-life of at least about 3 years without refrigeration.

Claim 17 (original) The flavored coating of claim 1, wherein the coating will not leave a visibly detectable amount of coating on a human hand in an ambient environment.

Claim 18 (original) The flavored coating of claim 1, wherein the coating is substantially free of a grit-increasing agent.

Claim 19 (currently amended) A method of enrobing a confectionery product which comprises the steps of:

placing-disposing-the-a reduced-fat flavored coating comprising a flavoring agent in an amount sufficient to provide a selected flavor, a sugar matrix of sugar crystals and sugar glass in an amount effective to provide the coating with sufficient structural integrity to prevent flowability at temperatures less than about 40°C, and a plurality of microspheres comprising a dry hydrocolloid component that are dispersed through the flavoring agent and sugar matrix to provide a slippery mouthfeel that mimics fat and begins to disperse when in contact with saliva so as to mimic the melting of cocoa butter during consumption of chocolate, the flavored coating is at least substantially anhydrous and has less than about 10 weight percent fat, and the fat present exists as dispersed microdroplets within the coating-of-claim 1-over a portion of a confectionery product, and

drying the flavored coating to at least a substantially anhydrous state.

Claim 20 (currently amended) A method of making a reduced-fat flavored coating which comprises:

combining a sufficient amount of flavoring agent to provide a selected flavor, a sugar matrix formed from a plurality of sugar crystals and sugar glass, and a plurality of microspheres comprising a dry hydrocolloid component to provide a slippery mouthfeel that mimics fat and begins to disperse when in contact with saliva so as to mimic the melting of cocoa butter when being consumed;

combining the flavoring agent, sugar matrix, and microspheres with milk to form a flowable reduced-fat flavored coating; and

drying to at least a substantially anhydrous form to provide the coating with a non-flowable texture, ~~wherein~~ the reduced-fat flavored coating has less than about 10 weight percent fat which exists as dispersed micro-droplets.